3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies – Vol 21(1): 35 – 46

Exploiting the Exploiter: Some Violations of Society's Expectations in *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Housemaid*

CHARLES MARFO
Department of Modern Languages
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
Kumasi, Ghana

Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Universität Potsdam
Potsdam, Deutschland
cmarfo@gmail.com

PHILOMENA ABEKA YEBOAH
Department of English
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
Kumasi, Ghana

LUCY BONKU
Kumasi Polytechnic
Kumasi, Ghana

ABSTRACT

This paper does a critical reading of Beyond the Horizon and The Housemaid and observes that the author, Amma Darko, seeks primarily to challenge prevailing and traditional views of motherhood held by African societies; i.e. motherhood and its associated activities such as caring, training and disciplining. Amma Darko sharply condemns this view and calls for a critical analysis of the nature of motherhood, especially in contemporary times. Agreeing with Amma Darko and taking issues raised by her even a little further, with snippets from the books, the paper brings to the fore the fact that the prevailing and traditional views of motherhood have inherent conflict with reality. That is to say, these views are carelessly assumed as problem-free. Within this context, we also critically bring into discussion the running theme of exploiting the exploiter in the two books within the framework of gender studies and queer theory. We also generally question the fixed categories of paradigms generated by normative ideology and conclude with the realisation that almost all mothers (and, for that matter, exhibition of womanhood) in these novels failed because of the wrong choices they made, which were basically and largely fuelled by challenging economic conditions.

Keywords: culture; exploitation; gender; motherhood; traditional expectations

INTRODUCTION

Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Housemaid* seek primarily to challenge prevailing views of motherhood held by African societies. In these novels, mothers are portrayed in their real complex natures as nurturers with potential to exploit even their own. In most African societies, the African woman is expected to experience motherhood since it is through motherhood that a woman can carve out a sense of dignity for herself. This traditional expectation is rooted in African spiritual belief. Mbiti (1970) asserts that a person's immortality depends not only on his progeny but, also, on whether one has descendants who remember him. This explains why a childless or barren woman is considered a failure in most Africa societies. The barren woman becomes a topic for gossip and, if she is married, she even risks the collapse of her marriage. Indeed, the significance of motherhood in African societies is central to such narratives as Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of*

*Motherhood***,** Ama Atta Aidoo's *Anowa* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*.

The belief in many African cultures that motherhood is an automatic role to be patronised by women is clearly expressed by Oduyoye (1995)**.** Referring to the traditional expectations of women in Akan societies, Oduyoye tells us that the female is analogous to other female animals in African societies. She is expected to fulfil biological roles as a mother; caring, feeding, training and disciplining, but never destroying her children. She states, "The aura of life and 'livingness' that surrounds the woman is assumed to be faithfully motherly" (Oduyoye 1995, p. 141). This statement reveals that, in African societies, the primacy of motherhood for women is not only a value shared and protected, but it also becomes an expectation that behoves on every woman to fulfil. As Irigaray (1987, p. 97) also notes "Our societies presuppose that the mother nurses the child for free, before and after giving birth and that she remains the nurse of men in society is particularly relevant to African societies". This expectation, however, has inherent conflict in the sense that it carelessly assumes a problem-free life towards mothering. In *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Housemaid***,** Amma Darko sharply condemns this traditional expectation on women by calling for a critical analysis of the nature of mothers, especially in contemporary times, where we encounter numerous instances of exploitation of mothers. Indeed, Glenn (1994) also notes motherhood ideology encompasses multiple contradictions as follows:

> Motherhood ideology certainly encompasses multiple contradictions. Mothers are romanticised as life-giving, self-sacrificing and forgiving and demonized as smothering, overly involved and destructive. They are seen as all-powerful holding the fate of their children and ultimately, the future of society in their hands and as powerless, subordinated to the dictates of nature, instinct, and social forces beyond their ken.
>
> Glenn (1994, p. 11)

In the rest of the paper, we strive to make it evident that almost all the mothers in these two novels failed as mothers. Along with this, we also critically bring into discussion the running theme of exploiting the exploiter; we observe cases of exploitation of women and womanhood with excerpts from the two books, focusing more on cases where the exploited (specifically, a mother, a wife or a daughter) in one relationship or another also exploits her exploiter(s). From where we sit, relevant issues addressed in the novels that we subject to discussion also include patriarchy and its effect on motherhood, mothers own role in their trials, and mothers' strategies at dealing with the trials of motherhood. Particularly, however, with pertinent observations, the paper concludes with the realisation that almost all mothers (and, for that matter, exhibition of womanhood) in these novels failed because of the wrong choices they made, which were basically and largely fuelled by challenging economic conditions.

FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Considering the issues of gender, sex, patriarchy, and exploitation that will be evinced from the two books, we discuss our running theme of exploiting the exploiter within the general framework of gender studies and queer theory (Foucault 1998, Butler 2004, Bennett and Royle 2009). This theory came to and has been at the forefront of the theoretical scene through feminist theory. The queer theory aspect of it, in particular, questions the fixed categories of sexual identity and the cognitive paradigms generated by normative (i.e., what is considered 'normal') sexual ideology (Brewton 2015). Subsequently, however, the theory has come to include the investigation of all gender, sexual categories and various identities. This has given the theory a positive outlook and has made it more appealing to most scholars

from the gender divide, hence its present description as gender studies and queer theory. Nego-feminism (Muhammad *et al*. 2014), which negotiates a common ground between male and female ego, could be captured by this theory. Others include Womanism, Stiwanism and Motherism (e.g. Alkali *et al*. (2013)).

In this study, we dwell in the gender studies and queer theory only in two seemingly opposing directions. On one hand, we observe appropriate traditional expectations from and/or impositions on a mother, a wife and a daughter that tend to obviate ill-behaviour. On the other hand, we strive to challenge those traditional expectations that tend to reduce a mother, a wife and a daughter into nothingness. That is to say, in employing the theory, our concentration is more on underscoring and observing the sanctity of womanhood rather than calling for what is socially odd or queer on the part of the female. However, we are not oblivious of the fact that, in one's attempt to challenge traditional expectations and impositions in the face of general acceptance or what is considered to be normal, queer could be the description of him or her. Indeed, in recent times, specifically since de Lauretis (1991), the word queer in the theory has often been aligned to discussion on homosexuality. Following Halperin (1995, p. 62), however, we contend that the word queer includes a lot more; it is 'whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence'.

OBSERVING THE BOOKS

BEYOND THE HORIZON

In *Beyond the Horizon*, a disgruntled wife (and mother) decides to punish the husband whose exploitation of her motherhood renders her a prostitute. Here, we observe an instance of the exploiter being exploited. In this novel, Mara, the narrator and the protagonist, journeys us through her life as a sweet, naive village girl who goes through exploitation at the hands of her husband. Her ordeal transforms her from a typical working wife to a prostitute bent on trading her body to men in order to cater to the needs of her children and mother who are back home in her motherland. As noted earlier, relevant issues such as patriarchy and its effect on motherhood, mothers own role in their trials, and mothers' strategies at dealing with the trials of motherhood are in perspective in this novel.

Questions about the relationship between a mother and her daughter seek an understanding of the expectations of a mother as it relates to the training of her daughter. Mara is put right in the centre of affairs. She is not just a prostitute, but a mother who merchandises her body for two reasons; to prove how responsible she is as a mother – i.e. through prostitution, she sends some money to her mother to care for her children – and prostitution becomes a strategy to exploit men's desire for sex (and to make enough money to enable her visit vengeance on the man who reduced her to a prostitute). Dako *et al*. (2006) deploys the fact that women use sex as a strategy to survive in challenging situations. It, however, also attempts to expose the futility in merchandising the female body as follows:

> How do women survive in this hostile environment, and what are their strategies in a thoroughly exploitative and materialistic society? ... Women … use essentially the interwoven survival strategies of fertility, sex, subservience, and exploitation. The bitter irony is that the female self is quite often ultimately diminished and devalued by the nature of the gains in these struggles.
>
> Dako *et al*. (2006, p. 281)

Mara's life in *Beyond the Horizon* reflects the arguments put forward by Dako *et al*. (2006). The extent to which Mara's husband, Akobi, contributed to Mara's trials constitutes

the burden of the present discussion. Akobi exploits Mara's position as his wife by turning her into a slave. Mara expresses this better as follows:

> It was natural too that when he demanded it, I slept on the concrete floor on just my thin mat. While he slept all alone on the large grass mattress so that even those nights when he ordered me to sleep on the thin mat on the hard floor, even if I lay there and could not sleep and suffered a splitting headache the next day because of lack of sleep, I regarded my suffering as part of being a wife and endured it just like I would menstrual pain. (p. 12/13)

The terms that are utilised in the above excerpt denote the presence of two judgments; superiority and oppression. In his relationship with Mara, Akobi adopts the double role of an aggressor and an exploiter as the following excerpt indicates. For him, Mara is a means through which he can make a lot of money. He deliberately refuses to give Mara money for her upkeep and even instructs her to throw people's rubbish away for them in exchange for food.

> Now listen to me, he resumed, from now on you will throw Mama Kiosk's rubbish away for her, and she will pay you with foodstuffs and vegetables. And since that means you need not go to the market often, I can also save by cutting down on the daily chop money I give you. You understand?
> Yes, I replied, shaking all over. (p.11)

One could also observe that the excerpt above is indicative of the workings of the patriarchal structure in which a husband could assume the right to abuse and trap his wife for his own selfish motives. Without a struggle, as we read, the wife also accepts the abuse to which she is being put through. Akobi's practice of patriarchy finds expression even in the way he sold Mara's heirloom even without her knowledge, placating her with a promise to take her to Europe and turn her into the owner of a sophisticated dress making shop. Having gone to Germany, Akobi unleashes his alternative and vicious plan. He brings Mara to Germany not to fulfil the promise to her, but to further exploit her. In one exploitative event, a glass of wine laced with some weakening substance is given Mara by Akobi. Unknown to Mara, Akobi had invited about ten men to have turns with her in her drowsy state, as she recounts as follows:

> Something in the wine I had drunk, it made me see double and I felt strange and happy and high… so high that I was certain that I could fly free. Then suddenly, the room was filled with people, all men and they were talking and laughing and drinking. And they were completely naked! There must have been at least ten men for what I saw was about at least twenty images. Then they were all around me, many hairy bodies and they were stripping me, fondling me, playing with my body, pushing my legs apart, wide, wide apart. As for the rest of the story I hope the gods of Naka didn't witness it…. And this was what Osey and Akobi blackmailed me with so that I agreed to do the job at Peepy (p. 111/117)

Perhaps the most damning of all of Akobi's exploitative mechanism is his connivance with Peepy (the owner of the brothel in which Mara merchandised her body) to transfer all the money Mara makes into Akobi's account. All these trials Mara tolerates because she has been harbouring the belief that it is her karma as the following excerpt collaborates:

> But I was beginning to consider this situation as my karma. I resigned myself but at the same time, I began to wonder why couldn't I take control of my own life, since after all, I was virtually husbandless and, anyway, what did my husband care about a woman's virtue … so why should the money I make go to him? What had he ever done for me? Once a prostitute, always a prostitute; … The stamp would never leave me … if I couldn't help myself out of my situation, then why not turn it to my advantage? (p. 118/119)

Even though it takes Mara time to confront the reality of her plight, upon realizing the exploitative nature of Akobi, Mara rejects the idea of being a pawn in the hands of her husband. Thus, she decides to attack the patriarchal Akobi. Indeed, we realise in the excerpt above that, having resigned to her present fate, she also thought of making a 'better' livelihood out of her predicament. After recounting the loss of her innocence and her obsessive attachment to prostitution to her friend Kaye, as recounted in the extract below, we also see Mara affirming her determination to ensure that all the money she makes through prostitution comes to her directly.

> I turned and faced Kaye and said, Kaye, I came to you and Pee and all the others with thick bushy hair which has now been exotically cut short close to my scalp. My eyebrows have been plucked thin. … And I have received into me the rigid tools of many men and accompanied them on sinful rides through the back doors of heaven and returned back with them on earth, spent men. I am no longer green and you know it. As for the morals of life my mother brought me up by, I have cemented them with coal tar in my conscience. If the gods of Naka intended me to live by them, they should have made sure I was married to a man who loved me and who appreciated the values I was brought up with. I lived by these values until I could no longer do so. The rot has gotten too deep for me to return to the old me. That is why, Kaye, I am going to do the films and the stage shows and all there is to it. But I want every pfennig of what I make to come to me! (pg. 217)

The implication then is that Mara is now electing to take full control of her finances and, by extension, rendering Akobi incapable of siphoning her money. That is the first step toward exploiting the exploiter. Explaining further, the above extract demonstrates the extent of Akobi's exploitation of Mara; she reminds us of her innocence before she journeyed to Germany where she was blackmailed by Akobi, an act which occasioned her entrance into prostitution. Her description of her current self or state indicates her transformation and her present profession as a prostitute. With masochistic delight Mara presents her case, example how she has received into her genitals the rigid "tools" of many men, it is important to note that Mara does not immediately elicit from her listeners sympathy. Ultimately, however, and emphasizing on what the husband has taken her through and intended to benefit from her, she elicits sympathy and support to be understood in her resolve to manage her own finances through schemes of exploitation and indeed to get back at her husband. She is persuading the listener to understand her attempt to take over the livelihood of the husband and to get back at him in return. A feeling of a tremendous sense of wasted potential is still obvious here though, as Mara summarily explains why she is so determined to delve deeper into prostitution.

Mara's view of her male clients as 'spent men' may have been a calculation on the part of the author, Amma Darko, to make us pity the men, in which case they become the exploited (in terms of strength that is spent and wasted at the end of a bout of sex). However, we also observe that Mara's morals and conscience have really become darkened. No wonder she brags that she has literally used coal tar, a thick black sticky substance, used especially for making roads, to cement her conscience. Amma Darko's balanced appropriation of propaganda is seen in her ability to really tell the whole truth about Mara. Otherwise, why would a mother elect to make money out of prostitution and send it to her children back home instead of going home herself to mother them properly? Mara says of her present situation; 'Material things are all I can offer them. As for myself, there is nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them' (pg.140). Despite her predicament, however, Mara feels satisfied for she thinks that she has dealt the hardest blow to Akobi, and that she is also providing for the material needs of her two boys. The hardest blow to Akobi is the information Mara gives to Gitte, Akobi's German wife, which actually spelt the end of his nefarious lifestyle. In a letter

to Gitte, Mara expose to her all of Akobi's relationship with his lover, Comfort. The end of Akobi is summarily presented thus:

> Akobi is in jail here in Germany. He attempted to sneak out while still owing money to the bank and a couple of mail order houses and was caught. I am sure he wanted to follow Comfort when she got deported. Everything he and Gitte owned has been taken by the bank. Gitte has divorced him and returned to her family. (p. 138-139)

Critically, one realises here Amma Darko's sense of poetic justice and skill of visiting it on a character (as visited on Akobi). Darko walks us to observe the brutal schemes of Akobi, an exploiter of a woman (specifically, his own wife and mother to his children). Ultimately, however, he is also exploited by this same woman. It must however be stated that both Akobi and Mara are diminished by the nature of gains they make, translating into a larger understanding of the uselessness in using exploitation to correct wrongs.

THE HOUSEMAID

In Darko's *The Housemaid,* we encounter a second case of the exploiter being exploited between Sekyiwa and her daughter, Tika, as well as between Maame Korkor and her daughter, Bibio. It is Sekyiwa's choice of young men as bed-mates which creates a major conflict between her, her husband and her only child, Tika. Tika's resolve to avenge her father's maltreatment by her mother then becomes the leitmotif of the never-ending conflict between mother and daughter. Sekyiwa as the exploiter then turns out to be exploited by her own daughter. That is, Sekyiwa had earlier on exploited her husband's desire for a child. Having engaged in a clandestine relationship with this married man, Sekyiwa's announcement of pregnancy opens the way for this man to divorce his wife, marry Sekyiwa and make her rich through her textile business. Amma Darko's rendition of the sequential improvement in Sekyiwa's life as a result of the pregnancy legitimises Oduyoye's (1995, p. 90) viewpoint that the one most important factor governing and ensuring the survival of marriages in most African societies is procreation. It is clear then that by narrative design, Amma Darko reviews some cultural practices in Ghana as the following extract suggests.

> His wife was barren and rumours had it that this was the result of an abortion she had had when they were courting. Then Sekyiwa got pregnant. And the man felt his obligation to his unborn child transcending his loyalty to his wife. He left her. (p. 9)

The last sentence of this extract, made up of just three words, reflects the ease with which this man leaves his wife for Sekyiwa. As rumours suggest, we observe that the barrenness is even the result of an abortion for which this man was responsible. Later on, Sekyiwa tries to justify her actions to Tika as follows:

> You selfish, egoistic, self-centred child! She said bitterly. I will no longer be haunted by what I did or did not do to you. You say I am a murderess for jilting a man who also jilted someone else? What should I call you too, heh? (p. 27)

Sekyiwa's reaction to Tika's accusation that she (Sekyiwa) has been the cause of her father's ill-treatment of his first wife reveals why Sekyiwa does not regret her ill-treatment of her husband. After all, she is also a woman and he deserves it too.

In the novel, Sekyiwa is introduced to the reader as a ". . . 100 percent illiterate stinking rich and riddled with guilt" (p. 18). Sekyiwa's wealth is metaphorically seen as "stinking", and this reveals Amma Darko's judgement of this character. It dawns on the reader that, for an illiterate woman like Sekyiwa, her strategy is to use what Dako *et al.* (2006, p. 276) calls "the interwoven survival strategies of fertility, sex, subservience and

exploitation." Interestingly and for the understanding of the theme exploiting the exploiter, the money Sekyiwa makes through the exploitation of her husband is also controlled by those young men referred to as "gold-diggers". The exploiter is exploited, and so whatever gains she makes come to naught. In connection with Sekyiwa's exploitative acts, Dako *et al*. (2006, p. 276) argue "The bitter irony is that the female self is quite often ultimately diminished and devalued by the nature of the gain in these struggles." Indeed, Teacher's (a character in the novel) worry about the neglected state of Sekyiwa later reveals the vanity of Sekyiwa's exploitative mechanisms. The following is an example:

> Tika, about your mother, she began, paused, saw that there was no reaction yet, and continued, she is not a woman of means anymore, you know. She is growing old as well. And you her only child, have also abandoned her. You know what that can lead to, or? (p. 106)

Tika's resolve to abandon her mother is also part of her exploitative mechanism of the exploiter, the mother. The first blow she deals Sekyiwa is to exploit her plea for forgiveness. As the following excerpt presents, despite the business proposal and the 'fat cheque' given to her by Sekyiwa as seed capital, Tika refuses to forgive her mother.

> So now am I forgiven? She asked when she handed it over. Tika looked at the cheque, then at her mother, and mumbled something. Sekyiwa continued to stare at her expectantly. When Tika still said nothing, Sekyiwa's heart sunk. What else could she do? If this generosity had failed to make an impact on Tika, then maybe the best thing to do was to sit back and wait for Tika herself to decide when to forgive her. Sekyiwa rested her guilt (p. 21-22)

The cheque is described as 'fat', implying that Sekyiwa gave her a lot of money. Yet, Tika's behavior towards her mother, despite her mother's role in setting her up in business, proves how resolute she is in letting her mother pay for abusing her father. Later in the novel, Tika openly ridicules her mother for acquiring her wealth through the pilfering of her father's wealth: "Tika went on. 'After all, didn't it come from one of their illustrious sons?" (p. 47)
Tika's resolve to punish her mother also stems from Sekyiwa's partial neglect of Tika when she was but a child. Time and again, Tika's desire to play with her mother remained only an illusion. Obsessed as she is to make more profit and spend it on her boy-lovers, Sekyiwa would always leave Tika in the care of house-helps. What the reader sees here is an illustration of Glenn's (1994, p. 14) argument that "In fact, mothers' interest and children's interest may conflict and mothers may be forced to choose between them." Through the use of the following dialogue for example, Amma Darko reveals how a mother's lascivious and/or libidinous desire for sex can sever mother-daughter bonds:

> Then as if seeking emphasis, she added, So Dada won't come back again?
> No, Sekyiwa replied.
> Who will play with me on Saturdays if you do not take me to the shop?
> I will find somebody.
> Why can't you play with me?
> Because I have to make money to look after us.
> So when you finish making money, will you play with me?
> But before Sekyiwa could answer that, she was summoned to talk to the new house-help she wanted to employ to look after Tika. Little Tika continued to wait and hoped for the day her mother would finish making money and come to play with her. (p. 20)

Language used in this dialogue presents two parallel universes; one that signals indifference (to expression of a need) and the other signalling betrayal. Sekyiwa deprives Tika of the companionship she craves for as a child, since Sekyiwa has to make herself available to her boy-lovers. Tika, on the other hand, feels the loneliness that comes with the

death of her father who hitherto had played that role so well. Furthermore, the dialogue signals the beginning of the break in communication between mother and daughter, which created in Tika an emotional distance, resulting in her resolve to pay her mother back for exploiting her childhood in this manner. That is to say, Sekyiwa's exploitative negligence of her child's need for a mother-daughter companionship, which deprived Tika of the opportunity to further probe the meaning of motherhood comes back to haunt her, hence the realisation of the exploiter being exploited. The loss of opportunity to bond with her mother creates in Tika a hatred for her mother, which Tika exhibits. Indeed, this hatred ultimately fed into Tika's unflattering perspective of what it means to be a mother and a wife. That is, Tika considers Sekyiwa's ill-treatment of her husband and her refusal to play with her (Tika) during her formative years as adequate reasons for her not to marry and have children. She argues out her case so simply as follows.

> I won't keep this pregnancy, mother. It will make me do to Attui's wives what you did to father's first wife. And what if it grows to be to me what I have become to you? I know you are not proud of me. I am no blessing to you. I don't only blame you for the loss of my father. Inside her, pointing to her heart, I blame you for the loss of Owuraku too. You brought me up to value money above all else. (p. 27)

Tika's awareness of her mother's desire for forgiveness directs her exploitation of her mother. In the process, Tika becomes a sadist whose exploitative happiness derives from her mother's suffering. Amma Darko puts this so well; "Tika saw her mother's turmoil and relished it". (p. 21). A classic example of an exploiter being exploited is showcased; to deepen her mother's pain the more, Tika elects to be barren so as to deny her mother of the much needed grandchild. It is important to note that Tika's action here constitutes not only a payback time to Sekyiwa; it is also Tika's way of rejecting society's prescription of automatic motherhood or child-bearing for all females. The tension and conflict created by Sekyiwa's exploitation of Tika teach that mothers ought to be careful when it comes to exploiting their daughters, for the wrong may never be forgiven.

In a second mother-daughter conflict, we encounter Maami Korkor and her ten-year old daughter, Bibio. Bibio's view of her mother as a failure deserving criticism is fueled by her belief that her mother has left the burden of caring for her two younger siblings on her shoulders, a ten-year old child. In a rather tense dialogue (at p. 11), Bibio vividly puts her mother's sense of irresponsibility to her.

> Bibio: Your son and his friend, they brought me something from the rubbish dump …
> Maami Korkor: They still go scavenging on the rubbish dump? Haven't I told you not to allow them?
> Bibio: Maami Korkor, which of the two boys did I bring into the world?
> Maami Korkor: I don't like your tone Bibio.
> Bibio: Too bad. You should have sent me to school to learn some manners there. But since you rather let me stay at home to play mother to you and your friend's sons, where else can I learn my manners but in the streets? And don't forget, Maami Korkor that this very blouse I am wearing also came from the rubbish dump.
> Maami Korkor: (But how could she change things? She had to hawk fish from dawn to dusk to earn just enough to feed herself and four children. Not a pesewa came from their father.)
> Bibio: Why after making Nerely with him when you realised how irresponsible he was, did you go ahead to make Akai, me and Nii Boi as well?

Here, we see a daughter vituperating against her depraved mother's inability to send her to school and the mother's inability to control her libidinal instincts. We observe, however, that Bibio's exploitation of her mother's depraved situation is a reaction to Maami Korkor's earlier exploitation of Bibio, for we glean from the tensed dialogue that Bibio has become a baby-sitter not only for her siblings but also for the children of her mother's friend.

For her mother to be 'free' to hawk her fish from dawn to dusk, Bibio has to shoulder the responsibility of caring for her siblings rather than go to school.

While Bibio may have had a point to vent her spleen on her mother, she fails to understand that her mother is trapped, since she has to single-handedly provide for their needs. She fails to see that her mother's life has been circumscribed by economic hardships as well as by the laxity that patriarchal society allows fathers to desire sex without desiring to take care of their offspring. Riche (1986) has emphasised the need for daughters to also consider the larger issues entrapping their mothers before they label them as failures. She notes, "It is easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her" (Riche 1986, p. 235). On her part, Maami Korkor fails to summon the courage to mitigate Bibio's anger. She rather opines that "In Bibio's mind she would always be wrong" (p. 12), and this suggests a concession of failure. That is, if a mother cannot correct her daughter's view of her as a 'sex maniac' and as an irresponsible mother, then it means she admits culpability. The mother's energy to fight back is sapped by the fact that there is some element of truth in her daughter's condemnation of her. Here, a mother's self-worth in the eyes of her daughter is ultimately diminished and devalued.

In both cases of Maami Korkor-Bibio relationship and Sekyiwa-Tika relationship, exploitation is observed, even if they are not of the same magnitude. Mothers exploit the childhood and vulnerability of their daughters among other exploitations (e.g. Sekyiwa's exploitation of her husband) and, consequently, daughters exploit their mothers' lack of circumspection and sexual weakness, and use these as reasons to talk and behave rudely to their mothers. There is however a difference in the two mothers' reactions to their daughters' accusations. Whereas in the Maami Korkor-Bibio exchange Maami Korkor simply accepts her daughter's accusation and even gives in to her demand, in the Sekyiwa-Tika exchange, Sekyiwa fights back at Tika's accusation of her which she considers unfair even if it holds an element of truth. Sekyiwa's rhetorical question, "What shall I call you too, heh?" (p. 29), is an indictment on Tika, who, Sekyiwa thinks, is also a hypocrite and a murderess by refusing to let an innocent foetus live to term simply because she is bent on inflicting pain on her. Also, juxtaposing the two mother-daughter relationships, we observe differing levels of crime. From the presentations above, one could observe that Sekyiwa and Tika's crimes supersede those of Maami Korkor and Bibio's in terms of condemnation on moral grounds.

The third instance of 'exploiting the exploiter' in the novel features a three-generational household that seek to exploit for they feel they have been earlier exploited. This household is represented by a grandmother, a mother and a grand-daughter. It is the story of this three-generational household which makes the structure of this novel a rather complex one. Indeed, Kofi Anyidoho asserts in his Introductory Notes to Amma Darko's *Faceless* that the title of this novel, *The Housemaid*, is misleading in that the housemaid is really not the central character. He presents this as follows.

> It is important that we are not misled by the title of Amma darko's second novel, *The Housemaid*, into unduly focusing critical attention on the girl Efia, the housemaid in the story. Indeed, it is doubtful whether we should regard her as the true 'central character' of this novel. In fact, she does not even properly enter the story until we are almost half way through the narration.
> Anyidoho (2003, p. 12)

The story of Tika and her housemaid, Efia, constitutes the foreground narrative of the novel. However, the Tika and Efia story is linked with the story of Tika and her mother (in connection with Tika's father) and on another level, with the story of Bibio and her mother. It is clear then that, by plot design, *The Housemaid* reveals a complex plot which also depicts an interface between form and content. *The Housemaid* is the life story of Tika, her journey from an innocent child to a businesswoman, and taking on a housemaid to cater for her

housekeeping demands. Efia, the housemaid, is manipulated, and for that matter exploited, by her grandmother and mother into getting pregnant. The idea behind their exploitation of innocent Efia is to realise an avenue through which Sekyiwa's and Tika's misappropriation (or exploitation) of Tika's father's wealth would return to Kataso, Tika's father's hometown. As captured in the following dialogue (p. 46-47), in this three-generational household, it is the grandmother who is the main protagonist as she is the one whose calculus maps and rolls out the exploitative strategy, and who teaches her grandchild how to execute it. The reader is also able to see and analyse the influence and impact of Efia's grandmother's advice on Efia and her mother.

> So my granddaughter, if you ask me, the present circumstances are no coincidence at all. It has been destined this way ever since that day that evil wife stole our illustrious son's . . .
> Please, mother . . .
> The gods and ancestors of this village of ours designed everything. And your going to live with her is an essential piece of that design. So hear me! Be subservient, humble and very dependable . . .
> Good advice, mother!
> Then get yourself pregnant.
> W-h-a-a-t?
> You both heard me right. Efia, you will live with her, win her affection, become indispensable to her. So that when you innocently become pregnant . . .
> Innocently? How does she become pregnant innocently? Efia's mother asked.
> By pretending she was forced into the sexual act, the old lady replied.
> By whom? the mother again.
> It doesn't matter. Hers is just to get pregnant.
> How? asked Efia innocently.
> Fool! By sleeping with a man. How else? her mother yelled, warming to the old lady's plan, whatever it was. 'Don't tell me you don't already know about that! the old lady cast her daughter a curious look and smiled a little.

The complex nature of the plot, which starts from the middle of the story, comes back to the past and continues into the present, is seen as reflecting the lives of the female characters in the story. This is in a sense that whereas the working-life of these female characters seems exciting (owing to the workings of their exploitative strategies), they still have to confront their past when the whole exploitative system fails to enrich their lives and diminish their value as well. The present then becomes a struggle, a struggle meant to expose mistakes of the past. In other words, as has already been noted, it is important to emphasise that, interestingly the mothers we have observed use exploitation as a strategy to escape the trials of motherhood. Exploitation then becomes a choice for these mothers in their bid to survive hardships, and it is this same choice that we see Efia's grandmother and mother make. Efia's grandmother and mother's obsession to enrich themselves through Efia's stay with Tika transcends the necessity for these 'mothers' to see to the proper upbringing of Efia. In this rather frightening story, we realise the multiple contradictions of motherhood as given in *Section 2.1* from Glenn (1994, p. 11).

Critically, we observe that Efia's grandmother and mother's advice to Efia to get pregnant is a plan to coax the barren Tika to adopt Efia's child, who would then become a means of siphoning all of Tika's wealth not only for Efia and her people but for the whole of Kataso. This sinister blue-print then is an exploitative quest. These two mothers immediately exploit Efia's sexuality as they remotely exploit Tika's barrenness; Efia's body is to provide the physical labour of bearing and raising a child, while the moral authority and control over the child's presumed future wealth will be conferred on the grandmother

We also observe from the dialogue that the grandmother represents a radical shift from what the Ghanaian traditional society expects from an old woman. In the traditional setting, an old woman is expected to be the repository of wisdom. She is a guide to the younger generation and it is she who is the thermometer of what constitutes corrective and

impeccable moral behaviour. However, Efia's grandmother deviates from this traditional expectation and rather becomes a schemer of evil. Indeed, with this dialogue, Amma Darko gives her readers the opportunity to hear and see for themselves how a grandmother can be a manipulator and make her daughter and granddaughter partners in crime. This technique strategically positions readers to analyze and criticise the behaviour of this old lady whose actions are motivated by her greedy desire to amass wealth for herself, her family, and to gain recognition in Kataso as the following snippet (p. 48) indicates.

> So I am happy that we are all in agreement now. It means success is assured. Our task will be to make sure that the child never forgets who her real mother is. That way, the wealth will also belong to Efia, and therefore to all of us. We will transform Kataso. The village will hold us in great estimation. May our ancestors see us through with dogged determination.
> Oh, mother! admiringly.
> Oh, grandmother! shyly.

Through the old lady's devilish plan, Amma Darko voices the limitations and repercussions that arise when the female body is valued only for its reproductive and other potentials. Oduyoye's (1995, p. 10) statement that "The livingness of the daughters of Anowa, is limited to their biology" is apt here.

CONCLUSION

Within the framework of gender studies and queer theory, we have attempted to drum home the point that Amma Darko's *Beyond The Horizon* and *The Housemaid* speak not only of the trials of motherhood. More importantly, we have strived to link these trials of motherhood to mothers' exploitative strategies at surviving these trials by becoming exploiters not only of men but of their daughters as well. Concerning the theme of exploiting the exploiter, save the three-generational case, we have given insights, explicated and exemplified that, consequently, the exploited exploit the exploiter from diverse motivations even to the point of exacerbating woes. As a step against social expectations, we also observe a refusal of and attack against motherhood in the case of Sekyiwa-Tika relationship and Maame Korkor-Bibio relationship respectively, thus a reject of society's expectations of automatic reverence for motherhood.

Concerning the author of the books, we contend that for a female writer to assume such a frank and frightening position in her explication of why mothers are on trial is not only an act of pure courage; it also shows how the female writer believes, like Aristotelian students, that literature should be a bitter medicine administered to bring healing to individuals and the society as a whole.

REFERENCES

Alkali, M., Rosli Talif, Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and Jariah Mohd. Jan. (2013). Dwelling or Duelling in Possibilities: How (Ir)relevant are African Feminisms? *GEMA Online®Journal of Language Studies,* Vol. 13 (3): 237-253.

Alkali, M., Rosli Talif, Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and Jariah Mohd. Jan. (2014). Liminality space in-between: A feminist evaluation of primordial and modern polarities of the woman's journey in the Nigerian novel, *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, Vol. 20 (1): 129-142.

Anyidoho, K. (2003). An Introductory Essay to *Faceless*. *Faceless*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.

Bennett, A, and Nicholas Royle. (2009). *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Brewton, V. (2015). Literary theory. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* . Retrieved February 24, 2015 from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/literary/print>

Butler, J. (2004 [1991]). Imitation and Gender Insubordination. In S. Salih and J. Butler (Eds.) *The Judith Butler Reader*, 119-137. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing

Dako, K., Denkabe, A. & Yitah, H. (2006). Pawns and players: The women in Amma Darko's novels. In Oppong, C., Afriyie Oppong, Y. P. & Odotei, I. K. (Eds.), *Sex and Gender in an Era of AIDS: Ghana at the Turn of the Millennium*, (pp. 273-286). Accra: Ghana Sub-Saharan Publishers, Print.

Darko, A. (1995). *Beyond the Horizon*. London: Heinemann.

Darko, A. (1998). *The Housemaid*. London: Heinemann.

De Lauretis, T. (1991), Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities. *An Introduction, differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3:2, iii–xviii.

Foucault, M. (1998). *The History of Sexuality*. London and New York: Penguin.

Glenn, N. E. (1994). Social construction of mothering: A thematic overview. In Glenn, E. N., Chang, G. & Forcey, L. R. (Eds), *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency*, (pp. 1-32). London: Routledge.

Halperin, D. (1995). *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

Irigaray, L. (1987). *Sexe et Parenté* - Collection Critique. Paris: Editions de Minuit. [Eng. trans. by Gillian C. Gill as *Sexes and Genealogies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993].

Mbiti, J. (1970). *African Religions and Philosophy*. New York: Anchor, Print.

Oduyoye, M. A. (1995). *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

Riche, A. (1986). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York/London: W.W. Norton and Co.